

Trip Report — Michigan I 2024

May 6, 2024 to May 14, 2024
Guided by Cory Gregory



Without a doubt, the most enticing of the warblers we see on this trip is the range-restricted Kirtland's Warbler. This year, we had perfect views! Photo by guide Cory Gregory.

The Great Lakes State boasts an impressive collection of breeding birds but also a wide range of migrants which, when combined, makes Michigan a very birdy place indeed. Whether it was the southern hardwood lowlands, the coastal beaches, expansive Jack Pine forests, or even the boreal forests in the Upper Peninsula, we had lots of places to go and birds to see. The impressively-large Lake Michigan, Lake Superior, and Lake Huron all play a part in why Michigan can be so productive; the barriers to migration they pose in part condense migrants along the shorelines and we saw this firsthand with huge flocks of migrants overhead including hundreds if not thousands of Blue Jays gathering in the north.

Our adventure together got underway in extreme southwest Michigan, in Berrien County, where it didn't take long for us to see a quintessential shorebird, displaying

American Woodcocks right at our hotel the first night! Our first full day together started in the southern forests near New Buffalo where we tracked down White-eyed Vireo, Blue-winged Warbler, and more, before nearby grasslands granted us some sneaky specialists like Sedge Wren, Henslow's Sparrow, and Bobolink. But surely one of the main attractions of Berrien County is the many species of warblers one can encounter there. We focused on warblers and other migrants along the Galien River and were rewarded with point-blank Louisiana Waterthrush, a gorgeous Scarlet Tanager, and an Olive-sided Flycatcher teed up on a dead branch. We made a quick check at the Three Oaks Sewage Ponds and enjoyed the many Purple Martins, a few ducks like Blue-winged Teal, Ruddy Duck, and Lesser Scaup. After lunch at a nearby brewery, we birded the trails at Warren Dunes State Park for a couple of hours before an incoming storm pushed us out. Once the storm hit, we realized how serious it was! Because of a tornado in the south county, we had to head north and we slowly but surely made our way to South Haven. And a haven it was after such a storm!

The new day dawned and we made our way to Allegan State Game Area where we had outstanding luck with Grasshopper Sparrow, Bobolink, and a vocal Wood Thrush. Nearby, in the forested portions of the game area, we added Blue-winged Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, the snazzy Hooded Warbler, Ovenbird, Veery, and even the huge Pileated Woodpecker. At the Allegan Dam we focused our attention on one of the important targets, Cerulean Warbler. Not only did we get good looks at a male, it sang from right above us! Outstanding. Nearby, along the Kalamazoo River, we enjoyed the vibrant Prothonotary Warbler. Although we had ground to cover to get up to Gaylord, we did bird at the gargantuan Muskegon Wastewater System and we tallied a quick 30-40 species including many new waterbirds, gulls, and even a couple of very rare Fish Crows, the first record of that species ever for that well-birded location.

This morning was the morning we had been waiting for. Yes, we went birding in the Jack Pines near Grayling and you know what that meant, Kirtland's Warblers! Once we got out there, not just one or two, but many of these attractive and rare warblers were singing all around us. We ended up getting breathtaking views of one at an arm's reach; we were all speechless! Once we had our fill of the Jack Pine Warbler, we focused on other species and ended up adding some feisty Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, a couple Great Crested Flycatchers, Brown Creeper, and finally good looks at Ovenbird and Pine Warbler. At the Houghton Lake Flats Flooding, we enjoyed watching nesting Ospreys, several Sandhill Cranes, a few ducks and also a gorgeous male Northern Harrier. Just south of there, at the Houghton Lake Sewage Ponds, we witnessed several uncommon things like a gathering of 120 Black Terns! Also present was a

Common Tern which is very rare for this location. After lunch at a famous local diner we made our way to some odd grassland habitat west of Gaylord where we were successful in finding Upland Sandpipers and Brewer's Blackbirds.



This tour was a great one for warbler diversity. This Black-and-white Warbler was one of 25 species of warblers we tallied! Photo by guide Cory Gregory.

After birding our way north through the Lower Peninsula, it was time to head even farther north into very different habitats. We left Gaylord and went north until we found ourselves along the south side of the Mackinac Straits. We enjoyed views of the bridge but also views of Long-tailed Ducks and various mergansers before driving over the 5-mile long Mackinac Bridge. The forest opened up and we found ourselves in a surprising grassland/farming area where, crouched in a grassy field was a major highlight, 10+ Sharp-tailed Grouse on a lek! We watched with interest as they interacted a bit with each other. Nearby, at the Munuscong Potholes, we had memorable views of Upland Sandpipers, including one that perched on the powerline right above us, and also a singing Clay-colored Sparrow. Wow! Along the Munuscong River, during our pleasant walk, we also had completely out-in-the-open views of Virginia Rail along with Marsh Wrens, various waterbirds, and a couple of Caspian Terns. After lunch at a small cafe in downtown Sault Ste. Marie, we wound our way westward to the Point Iroquois Light Station and then on to Paradise, our home for two

nights. But we couldn't even make it to dinner without finding a major highlight along Preachers Road, a male Spruce Grouse! That night we were in for a treat as well, the owl researchers at Whitefish Point had caught a Northern Saw-whet Owl and were willing to show us this tiny predator up close. All this while overhead, a little bit of Aurora Borealis was trying to peek out from behind the clouds. What a way to close out an epic day.

We enjoyed an entire, relaxed day to bird at the well-known Whitefish Point. While Common Loons were migrating overhead through a bluebird blue sky, an observant Piping Plover stood nearby, kettles of Broad-winged Hawks gathered overhead, and even a late Rough-legged Hawk showed up. We tallied a nice collection of warblers as well including Black-throated Green, Blackburnian, Cape May, Nashville, and Tennessee. Later on, the Shelldrake Lake area hosted a few notable things like Least Flycatcher, a flock of Pine Siskins, and a Red-breasted Nuthatch came in. That afternoon we explored a different rural road through the northern bogs, the Farm Truck Trail. Sure enough, it provided us with another notable sighting, a point-blank female Spruce Grouse. Closer to dinner time, for those who wanted to explore the Tahquamenon Falls, we walked down the many steps and enjoyed close views of this roaring waterfall. That night we enjoyed another bonus sighting, the owl researchers had caught a few more things that they were willing to show us, a beautiful Long-eared Owl and a huge, intimidating Great Horned Owl. So cool! For those out late that night, we closed out the day with some more awe-inspiring Northern Lights dancing over Whitefish Bay.

Our stay in the Upper Peninsula had come to a close and we headed south but not before stopping at Pointe LaBarbe where we hit a pocket of migrants such as Palm, Black-and-white, Nashville, and Black-throated Green warblers. Across the bridge we visited yet another new habitat, this one hosting Northern Waterthrushes and a Chestnut-sided Warbler. We wound our way down the Lake Huron shoreline until we arrived at Tawas Point, our home for a couple of nights. The famed Tawas Point State Park was busy with migrants, even in the afternoon. Our hour of birding there yielded 9 species of warblers including Blue-winged, Yellow-rumped, Tennessee, Nashville, and others. The trees were full of Baltimore Orioles, Gray Catbirds, and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks; talk about serious eye-candy! What would the weather do? Would it push in more migrants overnight? We had to wait to find out.

The following morning, we returned to Tawas Point State Park, eager to see what migrants had just arrived. Needless to say, it was very birdy! More than 20 Baltimore Orioles were all around, a variety of gulls and terns were present offshore, raucous

Eastern Kingbirds dotted the trees, and the warbler migration was good indeed. We ended with at least 11 species of warblers including Palm, Cape May, Orange-crowned, and Golden-winged. That afternoon we returned to the park and over the course of 2-3 hours tallied nearly 60 species! Although the highlights were too many to list here, we especially enjoyed getting good looks at Orchard Oriole, Scarlet Tanager, 13 species of warblers, and shorebirds such as Short-billed Dowitcher, Solitary and Spotted sandpiper, and Lesser Yellowlegs. The ever-busy sandbar had 75 Bonaparte's Gulls mixed in with dozens of Common Terns which made for a full scope-full! Although it became very breezy and storms moved in, we were thankful for the migration we were able to witness.

Although this following day was also our departure day, it wasn't without birding! We stopped at Nayanquing Point SWA first thing and, over the course of an hour, added Willet to our list, 20 or so Dunlin, half a dozen American White Pelicans, and a variety of swallow species. But yes, it eventually was time to depart and so we made our way back to the Grand Rapids airport where we parted ways.

I want to thank each of you for making this trip possible. Michigan means a lot to me and I hope our sampling of the avifauna left you with fun, lasting memories. On behalf of Field Guides, we sincerely appreciate you choosing to enjoy some really fun birding with us! I hope I get to bird with you again and I hope wherever your path takes you until then, good birding!

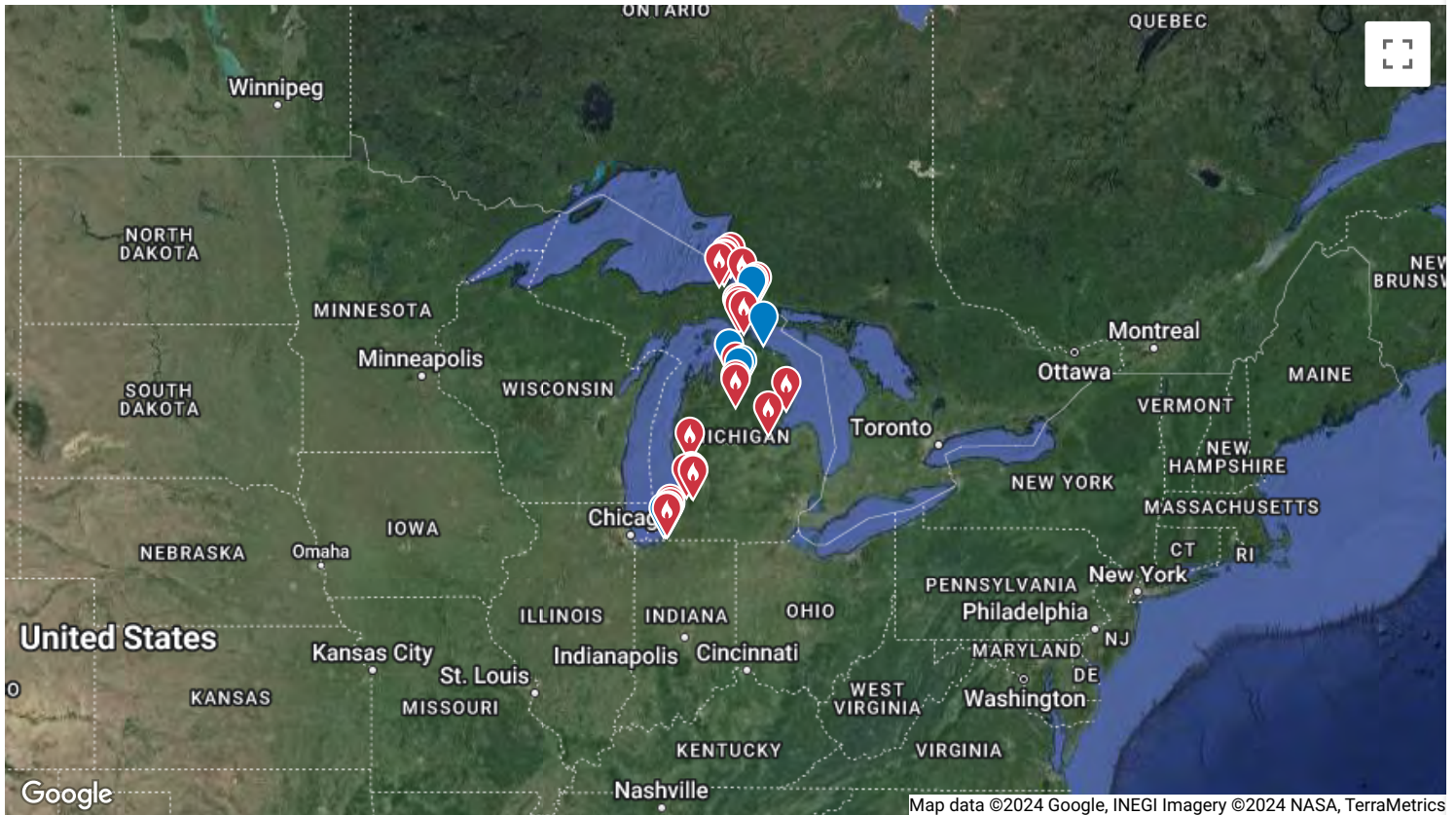
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--Cory Gregory (Curlew)

Field Guides Birding Tours -- MICHIGAN I, 2024 (with Cory Gregory)

6 – 14 May 2024 (9 days) Link-only



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Cory Gregory



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 182

















 41




























 25





























 2


























Species Observed



























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58	Canada Goose <i>Branta canadensis</i>	▶  11
9	Mute Swan <i>Cygnus olor</i> *	▶  1
12	Wood Duck <i>Aix sponsa</i>	▶  4
31	Blue-winged Teal <i>Spatula discors</i>	▶  6
14	Northern Shoveler <i>Spatula clypeata</i>	▶  3
24	Gadwall <i>Mareca strepera</i>	▶  3
17	American Wigeon <i>Mareca americana</i>	▶  5
68	Mallard <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	▶  7
2	Green-winged Teal <i>Anas crecca</i>	▶  2
3	Redhead <i>Aythya americana</i>	▶  1
3	Ring-necked Duck <i>Aythya collaris</i>	▶  1
59	Lesser Scaup <i>Aythya affinis</i>	▶  5
8	White-winged Scoter <i>Melanitta deglandi</i>	▶  1
35	Long-tailed Duck <i>Clangula hyemalis</i>	▶  1
10	Bufflehead <i>Bucephala albeola</i>	▶  3
2	Hooded Merganser <i>Lophodytes cucullatus</i>	▶  2
4	Common Merganser <i>Mergus merganser</i>	▶  2
50	Red-breasted Merganser <i>Mergus serrator</i>	▶  1  6
124	Ruddy Duck <i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>	▶  2
3	Wild Turkey <i>Meleagris gallopavo</i>	▶  3
1	Ruffed Grouse <i>Bonasa umbellus</i>	▶  1




























12	Sharp-tailed Grouse	<i>Tympanuchus phasianellus</i>	▶  2
2	Spruce Grouse	<i>Canachites canadensis</i>	▶  1  2
2	Ring-necked Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i> *	▶  1
2	Pied-billed Grebe	<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>	▶  1
1	Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i> *	▶  1
11	Mourning Dove	<i>Zenaida macroura</i>	▶  7
1	Black-billed Cuckoo	<i>Coccyzus erythrophthalmus</i>	▶  1
9	Chimney Swift	<i>Chaetura pelagica</i>	▶  3
4	Ruby-throated Hummingbird	<i>Archilochus colubris</i>	▶  2
3	Virginia Rail	<i>Rallus limicola</i>	▶  1  1
3	Sora	<i>Porzana carolina</i>	▶  1
3	Common Gallinule	<i>Gallinula galeata</i>	▶  1
7	American Coot	<i>Fulica americana</i>	▶  2
41	Sandhill Crane	<i>Antigone canadensis</i>	▶  7
31	Killdeer	<i>Charadrius vociferus</i>	▶  9
1	Piping Plover	<i>Charadrius melodus</i>	▶  1
11	Upland Sandpiper	<i>Bartramia longicauda</i>	▶  8  2
1	Short-billed Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus griseus</i>	▶  1
4	American Woodcock	<i>Scolopax minor</i>	▶  1
27	Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularius</i>	▶  5
1	Solitary Sandpiper	<i>Tringa solitaria</i>	▶  1
6	Lesser Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa flavipes</i>	▶  3
1	Willet	<i>Tringa semipalmata</i>	▶  1
1	Greater Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>	▶  1




























25	Dunlin <i>Calidris alpina</i>	▶  2
1	Least Sandpiper <i>Calidris minutilla</i>	▶  1
205	Bonaparte's Gull <i>Chroicocephalus philadelphia</i>	▶  3
1311	Ring-billed Gull <i>Larus delawarensis</i>	▶  9
549	Herring Gull <i>Larus argentatus</i>	▶  10
14	Caspian Tern <i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	▶  2  4
134	Black Tern <i>Chlidonias niger</i>	▶  1  2
43	Common Tern <i>Sterna hirundo</i>	▶  4  4
12	Common Loon <i>Gavia immer</i>	▶  2  1
106	Double-crested Cormorant <i>Nannopterum auritum</i>	▶  9
11	American White Pelican <i>Pelecanus erythrorhynchos</i>	▶  2
7	Great Egret <i>Ardea alba</i>	▶  3
11	Great Blue Heron <i>Ardea herodias</i>	▶  5
38	Turkey Vulture <i>Cathartes aura</i>	▶  12
3	Osprey <i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	▶  2
1	Golden Eagle <i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	▶  1
1	Northern Harrier <i>Circus hudsonius</i>	▶  1
75	Sharp-shinned Hawk <i>Accipiter striatus</i>	▶  1
1	Cooper's Hawk <i>Accipiter cooperii</i>	▶  1
1	American Goshawk <i>Accipiter atricapillus</i>	▶  1
10	Bald Eagle <i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	▶  6
45	Broad-winged Hawk <i>Buteo platypterus</i>	▶  1  1
13	Red-tailed Hawk <i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	▶  5

1	Rough-legged Hawk <i>Buteo lagopus</i>	▶  1  1
1	Great Horned Owl <i>Bubo virginianus</i>	▶  1
1	Barred Owl <i>Strix varia</i>	▶  1
2	Long-eared Owl <i>Asio otus</i> Sensitive	▶  1
1	Northern Saw-whet Owl <i>Aegolius acadicus</i>	▶  1
4	Belted Kingfisher <i>Megasceryle alcyon</i>	▶  4
3	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker <i>Sphyrapicus varius</i>	▶  2
4	Red-headed Woodpecker <i>Melanerpes erythrocephalus</i>	▶  3
6	Red-bellied Woodpecker <i>Melanerpes carolinus</i>	▶  6
4	Downy Woodpecker <i>Dryobates pubescens</i>	▶  3
2	Hairy Woodpecker <i>Dryobates villosus</i>	▶  1
3	Pileated Woodpecker <i>Dryocopus pileatus</i>	▶  2
7	Northern Flicker <i>Colaptes auratus</i>	▶  5
1	American Kestrel <i>Falco sparverius</i>	▶  1
3	Merlin <i>Falco columbarius</i>	▶  3
1	Olive-sided Flycatcher <i>Contopus cooperi</i>	▶  1
1	Eastern Wood-Pewee <i>Contopus virens</i>	▶  1
2	Least Flycatcher <i>Empidonax minimus</i>	▶  2
4	Eastern Phoebe <i>Sayornis phoebe</i>	▶  3
4	Great Crested Flycatcher <i>Myiarchus crinitus</i>	▶  3
37	Eastern Kingbird <i>Tyrannus tyrannus</i>	▶  1  8
3	White-eyed Vireo <i>Vireo griseus</i>	▶  2
1	Yellow-throated Vireo <i>Vireo flavifrons</i>	▶  1

1	Blue-headed Vireo <i>Vireo solitarius</i>	▶  1
10	Warbling Vireo <i>Vireo gilvus</i>	▶  4
6	Red-eyed Vireo <i>Vireo olivaceus</i>	▶  3
519	Blue Jay <i>Cyanocitta cristata</i>	▶  12
19	American Crow <i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>	▶  8
2	Fish Crow <i>Corvus ossifragus</i>	▶  1  1
14	Common Raven <i>Corvus corax</i>	▶  5
24	Black-capped Chickadee <i>Poecile atricapillus</i>	▶  1  8
8	Tufted Titmouse <i>Baeolophus bicolor</i>	▶  4
6	Bank Swallow <i>Riparia riparia</i>	▶  3
21	Tree Swallow <i>Tachycineta bicolor</i>	▶  6
11	Purple Martin <i>Progne subis</i>	▶  1
72	Barn Swallow <i>Hirundo rustica</i>	▶  1  5
30	Cliff Swallow <i>Petrochelidon pyrrhonota</i>	▶  4
1	Ruby-crowned Kinglet <i>Corthylio calendula</i>	▶  1
2	Golden-crowned Kinglet <i>Regulus satrapa</i>	▶  1
1	White-breasted Nuthatch <i>Sitta carolinensis</i>	▶  1
2	Red-breasted Nuthatch <i>Sitta canadensis</i>	▶  2
1	Brown Creeper <i>Certhia americana</i>	▶  1
5	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher <i>Polioptila caerulea</i>	▶  4
5	House Wren <i>Troglodytes aedon</i>	▶  3
2	Winter Wren <i>Troglodytes hiemalis</i>	▶  2
5	Sedge Wren <i>Cistothorus stellaris</i>	▶  2

15	Marsh Wren <i>Cistothorus palustris</i>	▶  1  2
3	Carolina Wren <i>Thryothorus ludovicianus</i>	▶  2
6	European Starling <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> *	▶  2
22	Gray Catbird <i>Dumetella carolinensis</i>	▶  6
11	Brown Thrasher <i>Toxostoma rufum</i>	▶  4
9	Eastern Bluebird <i>Sialia sialis</i>	▶  3
3	Veery <i>Catharus fuscescens</i>	▶  2
2	Hermit Thrush <i>Catharus guttatus</i>	▶  2
3	Wood Thrush <i>Hylocichla mustelina</i>	▶  1  2
21	American Robin <i>Turdus migratorius</i>	▶  10
8	Cedar Waxwing <i>Bombycilla cedrorum</i>	▶  1
2	House Sparrow <i>Passer domesticus</i> *	▶  1
4	American Pipit <i>Anthus rubescens</i>	▶  1
1	House Finch <i>Haemorhous mexicanus</i> *	▶  1
6	Purple Finch <i>Haemorhous purpureus</i>	▶  1
22	Pine Siskin <i>Spinus pinus</i>	▶  2
8	American Goldfinch <i>Spinus tristis</i>	▶  5
1	Grasshopper Sparrow <i>Ammodramus savannarum</i>	▶  1
7	Chipping Sparrow <i>Spizella passerina</i>	▶  4
1	Clay-colored Sparrow <i>Spizella pallida</i>	▶  1  1
3	Field Sparrow <i>Spizella pusilla</i>	▶  2
35	White-crowned Sparrow <i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>	▶  1  7
2	White-throated Sparrow <i>Zonotrichia albicollis</i>	▶  1

1	Vesper Sparrow <i>Pooecetes gramineus</i>	▶  1
24	Savannah Sparrow <i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>	▶  7
2	Henslow's Sparrow <i>Centronyx henslowii</i>	▶  1
23	Song Sparrow <i>Melospiza melodia</i>	▶  9
1	Lincoln's Sparrow <i>Melospiza lincolni</i>	▶  1
8	Swamp Sparrow <i>Melospiza georgiana</i>	▶  3
1	Eastern Towhee <i>Pipilo erythrophthalmus</i>	▶  1
3	Yellow-headed Blackbird <i>Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus</i>	▶  1
13	Bobolink <i>Dolichonyx oryzivorus</i>	▶  4
6	Eastern Meadowlark <i>Sturnella magna</i>	▶  2
2	Orchard Oriole <i>Icterus spurius</i>	▶  1  2
60	Baltimore Oriole <i>Icterus galbula</i>	▶  1  8
143	Red-winged Blackbird <i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>	▶  14
20	Brown-headed Cowbird <i>Molothrus ater</i>	▶  7
4	Brewer's Blackbird <i>Euphagus cyanocephalus</i>	▶  1
62	Common Grackle <i>Quiscalus quiscula</i>	▶  9
6	Ovenbird <i>Seiurus aurocapilla</i>	▶  3
1	Louisiana Waterthrush <i>Parkesia motacilla</i>	▶  1
2	Northern Waterthrush <i>Parkesia noveboracensis</i>	▶  1
3	Golden-winged Warbler <i>Vermivora chrysoptera</i>	▶  2
6	Blue-winged Warbler <i>Vermivora cyanoptera</i>	▶  6
5	Black-and-white Warbler <i>Mniotilta varia</i>	▶  4  3
3	Prothonotary Warbler <i>Protonotaria citrea</i>	▶  1  2

4	Tennessee Warbler <i>Leiothlypis peregrina</i>	▶  4
1	Orange-crowned Warbler <i>Leiothlypis celata</i>	▶  1
7	Nashville Warbler <i>Leiothlypis ruficapilla</i>	▶  6
9	Common Yellowthroat <i>Geothlypis trichas</i>	▶  7
1	Hooded Warbler <i>Setophaga citrina</i>	▶  1  1
22	American Redstart <i>Setophaga ruticilla</i>	▶  1  6
5	Kirtland's Warbler <i>Setophaga kirtlandii</i>	▶  10  1
3	Cape May Warbler <i>Setophaga tigrina</i>	▶  3
3	Cerulean Warbler <i>Setophaga cerulea</i>	▶  7  2
10	Northern Parula <i>Setophaga americana</i>	▶  5
1	Magnolia Warbler <i>Setophaga magnolia</i>	▶  1
4	Blackburnian Warbler <i>Setophaga fusca</i>	▶  1  3
15	Yellow Warbler <i>Setophaga petechia</i>	▶  6
2	Chestnut-sided Warbler <i>Setophaga pensylvanica</i>	▶  2
3	Palm Warbler <i>Setophaga palmarum</i>	▶  3
5	Pine Warbler <i>Setophaga pinus</i>	▶  2
7	Yellow-rumped Warbler <i>Setophaga coronata</i>	▶  3
7	Black-throated Green Warbler <i>Setophaga virens</i>	▶  5
17	Scarlet Tanager <i>Piranga olivacea</i>	▶  3
12	Northern Cardinal <i>Cardinalis cardinalis</i>	▶  6
20	Rose-breasted Grosbeak <i>Pheucticus ludovicianus</i>	▶  6
11	Indigo Bunting <i>Passerina cyanea</i>	▶  5

ADDITIONAL TAXA

30	Aythya sp. <i>Aythya sp.</i>	▶  1
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500 Larus sp. *Larus sp.*

